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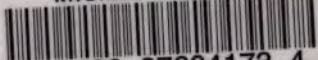
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AN ADIRONDACK IDYL.

CHAPTER I.

“ Ah, me !

The world is full of meetings such as this.”

“ In that instant o'er his soul

Summers of memory seem'd to roll.”

The boat had not quite reached the shore ; there were stones, and a log had drifted from somewhere, which made the rower hesitate about pulling in further, but it was near enough to hail the figure on the beach, which, leaning over something, half sitting, half kneeling, might have been grown or half so, his costume

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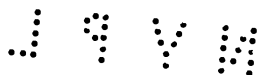
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denoting nothing but his sex. Raising her clear, sweet voice, the girl dropped her oars, and called, "Ben, Ben, will you tell your mother to send us what eggs she can and some butter? I have the pail! Come, pull me in so you can reach it!" The head spoken to raised itself quickly and a well-bred voice said, as a hand went immediately to a rather nondescript cap, "I beg your pardon."

Hilda Ward blushed and was covered with confusion; she felt herself burn all over as the owner of the voice and cap rose and, coming close to the water, said courteously, but with fun in every feature:

"Can I be of any service to you?"

Hilda gave a vigorous push and sent the boat past the end of the log on the stones and, raising her eyes to what seemed at first the face of a perfect stranger, said: "It is for me to beg your pardon. I need



not explain further than that I don't really see how I could have taken you for Ben Fish ; still I did, partly because it never entered my head there would be anyone else ~~here~~, especially—"

"Especially other than a native, I suppose you mean. Please, however, consider me a native, if by so doing I can help you. I believe there is some want to be supplied by my landlady ; is that it ? May I carry some message?"

"Butter and eggs, and, as you heard, I have the pail ; perhaps, as you are so much larger and so much more obliging than I ever found Ben to be, you will bring them down to me. The natives do procrastinate so dreadfully, though if you will pull me up a little I'll go up myself. Thank you ; you show a wonderful spirit of forgiveness."

"There can really be no question of forgiveness, when I am heartily glad of

your mistake. You would have not addressed me at all if I had not been thought to be Ben, and perhaps not even have stopped had you seen a stranger, though I don't look very formidable just now."

The man had, while talking, pulled the boat up, seated himself like a guide on the bow, helped the girl to land, and had then taken her pail and proceeded by her side up the hill towards a weather-beaten farmhouse, without fence, paint or other adornment. He looked rather weather-beaten himself, brown and red, with a beard of a month's growth, a man nearer forty than thirty, tall and strong, with an easy walk and fine carriage. She was little indeed beside him and, in the simple, durable dress of the campers across the lake, plain and in no way conspicuous. Refinement, a sweet voice, a complexion that flushed and paled, was all he had noticed, except that his companion was

beyond the age when girls were wont to look upon him as old.

"As I am going up myself, I need not trouble you with the pail nor to take the walk, thank you," as he handed it to her in some discomposure, having instinctively started up the hill on the slippery mountain grass. He took off his cap silently and returned to the boat he was trying to calk with white lead.

"Where have I seen her before?" he thought, "and why does she remind me of a conservatory of the choicest flowers? It must be some association I cannot grasp, and yet her voice makes me think we must have met before. I wonder who she is,—some visitor at that camp, I suppose. Well, the camp spoils the idea of the solitude of the woods for me. A man doesn't want society turned in on him when he is loafing about this way. She rather snubbed me, too; though at first she

was as pleasant as if we had both been brought up in these wilds. There, that is all I can do to this boat ; if it leaks still, I must get another or leave as I intended doing."

He was just turning around from hiding the lead under the upturned boat, knowing well the children would want to investigate it, when he saw the girl he had just ceased thinking of returning down the hill. He stepped at once to her side, took the pail from her hand before she really had time to know what he was doing, and asked in his delightful voice, deep and rich : " So the butter was ready ? And I hope you have left enough eggs for my mountain appetite. What an effect these mountains have on one in that way ; may I help you ? " Proceeding without any audible permission to push off the boat, after putting the butter and eggs carefully under the seat, he reached out his hand

to help the girl in, but she, whether resenting the attention as unnecessary or from something of coquetry or childishness from her more youthful days, ignored the hand and essayed the jump unaided ; but, alas for her independence, one foot splashed into the water and, losing her balance, she would have fallen against the boat, but the half-withdrawn arm was again reached out with its mate and she was saved from a probable bruise.

“ Oh, I beg your pardon, I do indeed,” she exclaimed. “ How stupid I am, and oh ! how wet ! ” looking ruefully at her shoe and stocking. He was still holding one arm to steady her and thus had time to think how light she was and how slender, and had again that half-defined feeling of recollection he had had before, when she continued, “ I suppose there is nothing for me to do but to be wet and go back as fast as my oars can row me. Thanks again

and I'm off." Still blushing with dismay at her blundering act, and resenting his smile and look of great amusement, she pulled with vigorous strokes till she was lost, not to sight, for the lake was too narrow for that, but was beyond recognition by the man still standing on the bank and looking after her with bared head and laughing eyes.

CHAPTER II.

We wished one another a cold "Good-day,"
You made me a courtesy, and went your way.

HEINE.

There is nothing like exercise to overcome discomfiture of a mental kind, and Hilda Ward felt better, though still chagrined, when she reached her friend's cottage at the camp. To reach the camp or land was to reach the cottage itself, for it had been built on a pile of rocks jutting out into the water, and surrounded on three sides by it, as it formed a bay with a beautiful sandy bottom, making a delightful bathing-place at the very door, with a beach for landing, used by the cottagers whose buildings were nearest it on the hill beyond.

The Bruce cottage, "Windward," had a beautiful site. One had only to sit on the broad piazza to see way up the lake to where the sky seemed to meet the mountains in places, and in others to bend down to the water. An island, seeming half way between, but really much nearer, dotted the water with its banks of green; the irregular shores peculiar to the Adirondack region, the tall hills and evergreen trees, the deep blue sky, the sound of the gentle swish, swish of the water against the rocks, among its crevices and against its sharp points, all made the idler, who looked and heard and rested, think no spot on earth could be more lovely.

Hilda pulled up her boat on the soft sand and, forgetting the butter and eggs carefully deposited under the seat, sprang up the steps leading directly from the beach to the piazza, and seeing no one there, opened the dining-room door,

closed because the wind, always lively from up the lake, played havoc with the small articles about the room. Mrs. Bruce was just coming out of the little kitchen. She had a cook, for being of a luxurious nature, she did not enjoy the camp idea of doing her own work, or living without work being done, and she liked nice things, as all nice women do. Hilda began at once.

“Muzzie, what do you think! our wilderness is invaded by the man of fashion and we can no longer do as we please! I’ve seen and talked to, been helped into the boat by, and been almost held in the arms of,—whom do you suppose? You’d never guess; in fact, I don’t believe you’d remember, if you did guess.” Hilda was too excited not to be a little incoherent in her speech. By this time the friends were out on the piazza, sitting both in a ham-

mock—about as uncomfortable a way to sit as one could find.

“But, dear, where is the butter, and couldn't you get eggs?” The housekeeper's mind could not longer be distracted. “What shall I do for lunch and dinner and everything if you couldn't get them?”

“But I did. They're in the boat. I hailed him, thinking he was Ben Fish, and with a shout told him to go up and ask his mother if she could let you have some. Just think, the fastidious George Scanning, in corduroys and a sweater, calking a boat, and ordered to get a pail of butter!”

“George Scanning!” Mrs. Bruce was hopelessly dazed. “Who is he? Where is he? And what are you talking about, Hilda?”

“My dear, he is here, or almost, and don't you remember my writing you about him years and years ago? And

how he called ever so many times when I visited you once, and yes, we met him out too."

"A very large man, was he, with a beautiful voice? I do remember; but what became of him?—you never told me."

"Oh, I don't know; we just drifted awhile and then he disappeared, and I've gone on drifting without him," dreamingly, looking across the lake. The excitement had died out of her face under her friend's questions and she looked thoughtful and a little sad. "I wonder why he came back;" she continued, "he went to Europe, I heard, to be gone indefinitely. Well, it is almost indefinitely—eighteen and now I'm twenty-eight. Muzzie (Mrs. Bruce's pet name caught from the children), he has forgotten me entirely. I knew him almost as soon as he spoke, but he hadn't any idea who I was or that

he had ever seen me before. Am I so changed?"

"My dear," cheerfully and truthfully, "you have not changed at all," and she looked at her friend with critical eyes. The face bore the scrutiny well, the broad, low forehead, the ruffling hair drawn simply back, the serious blue eyes, the full-lipped rather large mouth, sensitive, but with two little dimples near its corners, as if life had had much to laugh at,—not a sign of a line leading down to denote discontent. It was a sweet face, bright, intelligent, quick to sympathize and respond to varied emotions, with the changing complexion Mr. Scanning had noticed, not a beauty, probably she had never been called even pretty, but a face that would make and keep very dear friends, for it would be steadfast to the end.

"Hilda, you have always been so gay and cheerful that I had entirely forgotten

that I used to think at that time you liked that Mr. Scanning. You certainly gave me that impression, from your letters and in New York, too. How was it? I remember I supposed you had given him his *congè*."

"No, I never had the chance, Mary; I did like him, I believe, and one time I remember particularly, at Mr. Adams's in the conservatory, I was awfully upset and was sure he liked me; he did have such a fascinating way, and I was so young and foolish—I suppose little women always like 'huge men.' You want to know what happened? Why, just nothing; after that particular time I did not see him often, and then not at all, and finally he came and said he was off to Europe to stay he didn't know how long. Do you know, I have sometimes thought—"

'What, dear?'

"Oh, nothing; only I have had him to

compare other men with and somehow—I think he has always spoiled them for me. Now, don't be an old goose and think I do or have loved him, for it's no such thing. I had never thought of all this before; it has just struck me that it may be true."

"Didn't he know you to-day, Hilda?"

"No, he certainly didn't, and as soon as I really recognized him I hurried off; then when I came back what did I do but fall into his arms," and she went on to tell her mishap, holding out the unlucky foot to show how wet it had been. The sun had dried it pretty well, and they were all so used to sun baths for drying purposes, that, being so occupied with her adventure, she had forgotten all about it. Mrs. Bruce was most sympathetic, but rather disliked the idea of the invasion of their somewhat primitive fashion of living that an outsider seemed to forebode, and agreed with Hilda when she said she hoped they would see

no more of him. They were all old friends in the camp, with a few visitors, also well known to each other, and this arrival might, —she scarcely knew what, but she had a sort of foreboding that it would disarrange their simple plans for amusement.

CHAPTER III.

Heaven gives us friends to bless the present scene;
Resumes them, to prepare us for the next.

YOUNG.

“Aunt Hilda, won’t you come fish off the rocks?” and two little boys looked pleadingly up into Hilda’s face as she sat lazily enjoying the sunset.

The children had been forbidden to go on the rocks without an older person, the water was so deep there, and one of their favorite amusements was cat-fishing, a sport of which there was plenty ready at hand. It had been warm for the mountains, even the ever-present breeze had been a hot one, and Hilda had felt the effects of it that afternoon; but it was cool now, for the air always changed at four

o'clock, and the sunset was gorgeous. She had had a long tramp too ; some people from the other cottages had taken her off to investigate a new point they had discovered. She had enjoyed it—all the life of the woods was a joy to her—and it was never too warm, either. She really enjoyed heat that made other people fretful and inactive, but she liked the sunset too, and wanted to be able to see it uninterruptedly, and it was somewhat of a sacrifice to do as the children wanted. She made a concession. She would sit by them and help, but not fish herself, and they were quite happy. Leaning against a boulder that had been rolled from somewhere and left just above the water's edge among the rocks, she saw a boat leave the other shore and pull for their point. There were other boats on the lake, but this was not one of the campers, she knew them all. As it neared the

shore, she saw that her old friend, newly-found, was the only occupant, and coming alongside the rocks, he said :

“May I land, or is a permit necessary from your august President?”

Hilda seemed to remember his old trick of asking questions and not waiting for an answer, for she only said, “Good evening,” and he pulled his boat up in a place at her feet, where no one but an experienced oarsman would have thought of landing, and there it rocked with the waves while he stepped from stone to stone till he reached the boulder. Holding out his hand, he said :

“Miss Ward, how could you do so? Why didn't you disclose your identity? Why, I might have gone off to-morrow and never have known I was so near an old friend. We were friends too, weren't we?” He took her hand and held it, looking with earnest eyes into her face.

There was a strong personality about the man. If he had been a public speaker he would have been spoken of as having a great deal of magnetism, and the girl felt it again, as she remembered to have felt it years before, when she knew too little of life to understand or think of her sensations.

"Friends? Yes, I suppose we must have been," she said lightly, "as the world uses the term ; but your not recognizing me proves how light a thing what we call friendship is."

Mr. Scanning had thrown himself on the rocks near. Mrs. Bruce had plenty of cushions of all kinds and the boys had brought an armful for Hilda, which she silently offered to share by placing two near him. Two were totally inadequate for the man's unusual length, but he seemed suited with the provision, and looked very much as if only the slightest

restraint kept him from stretching out at as full length as the rocks would permit.

"I can't think how I came to be so stupid; but I did half know you; you don't know how roses and memories of you were struggling in my dull brain while you were up the hill. Don't you remember one of the last times we met, and the long conversation we had in Mrs. Adams's conservatory? You thought of doing great things with your life then, and I—Ah, how long ago it seems! How was it I didn't know you? You're the same little girl, pardon me, but it all comes back. And how has the world treated you? It should have been most kind."

"Indeed it has; I have little to complain of but monotony. You remember Mrs. Bruce?" as that lady appeared around the great stone and called the children. Mr. Scanning arose and held

out his hand, and whether he remembered or not, neither lady was the wiser.

A few polite commonplaces were exchanged. He said he had gone through these lakes once, years ago, and, wanting a bit of roughing it, had remembered this particular one and had come in for a few days. He looked up at the cottage, dimly visible now as the light was fading from the sky and a new moon was seen across the lake, and told her how pretty and picturesque it was, and asked if they staid in late. The children came running up, with luck and rods in hand and the trio went in.

Mr. Scanning evidently had no idea of saying Good-night; he threw himself down again with the strong feeling of satisfaction and restfulness some men feel in the presence of some women; nor did he seem inclined to talk, certainly he waited a long time, and Hilda finally said :

"Is it long, Mr. Scanning, since you came back from England?"

"Three months. Yes, this is August," and with a change in his voice, "My vacation is almost over."

"Why do you say vacation? You did not use to have to think of time as vacation, or of the restrictions that hamper men who work."

"Nor do I now, in that sense; but you see I'm half Englishman; do you remember about my mother and uncle?"

"Yes," softly the girl replied. "I remember!"

Scanning moved nearer, feeling the sympathy and something more in her voice, and with a moment's thrill he continued:

"Uncle Reg, you see, wants me back; he has no son, and mother was his only sister."

“Has he no children of his own?” Hilda asked.

“Yes,” hesitatingly. “One daughter. But what of yourself?” picking a handful of pebbles and throwing them one by one in the water. “Do you see the slight moon-track on the water? In a few nights it will be gorgeous, and what a place this is for seeing it, too! It comes up over that point, when it's full, doesn't it? I'll come and visit you then, if you'll permit, and may I bring my knitting, as the old ladies do when they intend to stay for a real visitation?”

“I thought you said you were going away to-morrow?” Hilda said laughingly.

“Did I?” throwing more stones. “Well, you are so good as to remember so much about me, do you happen to remember my ever leaving you when I was allowed to stay?” Then, as if afraid of his daring, he added: “Miss Ward, do you write the

stories now you said you were going to some day? You see I remember, too."

He looked up at her and thought what a quiet little figure she was, as, with her head against the boulder and her little hands idle in her lap, she looked up the lake at the water that was smooth as a mirror, with only a little ripple where the rocks touched it.

She did not look at him, and he, partly at her side and partly at her feet, gazed long at the slight girl he had known so well and had almost forgotten. He wondered at this, for a spell seemed upon him now, which he only felt with women who attracted him strongly, and it seemed impossible he should not always have felt her attractiveness as he did to-night.

"Yes, I write," the quiet voice said, and the little hands clasped each other with a nervous movement. "I am not at all

accomplished, you know, and it is all I can do, and it gives me great pleasure."

"I suppose I ought to know," he laughed; "but I don't, and want to, whether you are a great authoress? How you used to dream and criticize, and you had a most vivid imagination, too! nothing else is needed; you had it all."

"No," Hilda responded. "I am not a great anything. I have published a few stories, though I never would have had the courage, but for a dear friend who saw one I had written and stimulated me. The public is very kind; though I think it annoys my father to have me write. But for Mr. Shephard, he never would have known it. My friend says he takes great pride in me." The girl's face could scarcely be seen by her listener, but over it came a shade, at the thought of the kind friend who had for years wanted to be more than friend to her; and how much harder than

ever it seemed to-night that it would be to give him, on her return, the answer as he wished it to be, to the question he had asked so many times. She had scarcely thought of him since she had been away from home, but when she had done so it had been without the pang she felt just now, for she had had the growing thought that it might be best, after all, to be as he thought kind, and she had almost concluded that life meant no more than a calm existence with him would be, and love only the gratitude and liking she felt for her old friend. She started a little and clasped her hands tighter as she continued: "Father don't believe in women with brains above what he calls woman's work. But the island has disappeared, hasn't it? I like to watch it till it merges itself into the mainland. How soft the air is, and yet a breeze is coming. Oh!—" and the girl jumped aside almost against

Scanning, as a huge toad hopped on her skirt. Mr. Scanning raised it with his foot, and without ceremony threw it in the water. "Why did you!" regretfully exclaimed the girl, "they are horrid, but I don't want to drown them."

She was still standing, and he asked: "Are you not going to sit down again? But perhaps you think it time for me to be off," lazily getting up and going towards the boat. He stepped back, however, and holding out his hand, said:

"Miss Hilda, may I come to-morrow and take you rowing?"

"I have promised the children to go for berries early to-morrow and I must keep faith with them."

"May I go too?" he asked, "and then will you row? I am too lazy to plan far ahead, but I had arranged to go jacking to-morrow night, if I did not leave in the morning, which I shall not do now, having

found a friend, though it was one who would not recognize me. Do you know, I puzzled over you till Mrs. Fish, in her rambling talk, arrested my attention by mentioning the butter she had let a lady visitor at the camp have ; when she told me she had heard the children call you Aunt Hilda,—it all came back to me then. I knew at once why you reminded me of roses, though you were always more like a violet."

He held her hand rather lingeringly, asked her if nine o'clock was too early for berrying, said he would be punctual and was off, Hilda watching him shove off the boat and jump in, a rather difficult feat from such a landing-place. He took off his hat, called good-night, and she slowly turned and went up to the cottage.

She did not see him resting on his oars watching her. He was wondering why he had not recognized her ; but she had

only glanced at him once that day, and those big hats are discouraging to cope with. And then, there are so many girls when one is young ; there are fewer later on—certainly fewer one is interested in. She was always a sweet little thing. He remembered being very much impressed by that fact one evening, and thinking he had better “pull off,”—well, he would do that now again, at least as far as the Fish Mansion.

CHAPTER IV.

I thought on her throughout the day,
And thought on her through half the night,
And when at last in sleep I lay
A dream restored her to my sight.

HEINE.

"Why, Hilda, how fine you look!" Mrs. Bruce exclaimed the next morning as her friend appeared at the breakfast table with a blue waist, rather jaunty and elaborate for camp life.

"Do I look nice? One gets tired of old clothes. Are you coming with us berrying? Mr. Scanning said he would come over in time."

"Did he say anything about his wife?" Mrs. Bruce asked, as she supplied the children with sugar on their oatmeal.

"His wife! has he one?" Hilda asked, with surprise and many other emotions in her face and voice.

"Of course, I don't know," indifferently. "But men of thirty-five, and he must be that, usually have wives; perhaps he lost his, or may be he is off without her for fun, as men say. Because she is not with him by no means proves he hasn't a wife," and Mary Bruce saddened as she thought of her own life, of necessity so much away from the hard-working husband, who wanted his family to have every benefit of mountain air and change for all their sakes, but especially for one of the twin boys, who had never been strong.

Hilda was silent; she had never thought of that possibility; she had not thought at all. Last night had been a sort of pleasant dream, and as she pushed her breakfast away but little tasted, she said to herself: "Why should I care whether he has a wife or not? I don't." Aloud she spoke to the boys saying: "Chicks, I'll be ready in a few moments; we had better go early

for it will be warm, I think," and she left the breakfast-room, saying she thought the piazza would be a lovely place to breakfast on. Standing a while looking up the lake, from which the mist was rolling off, just disclosing to view the dainty little island, which a few moments' ago looked only like a huge cloud or larger, darker piece of the fog—which at that time of year covered the lake in the morning, more especially if it was to be a warm, clear day,—she passed into the house by the sitting-room door and up to her room.

"I'll not be guilty of such idiotic folly," she was thinking. "The idea! I'm twenty-eight, and trying to look fine for a man who never did care for me at my best, and who may be married, and I'm sure I don't care if he is!" But all the time the way his hair turned off his forehead, the broad high shoulders, the strong large hands, kept

coming back into her thoughts as she slowly took off the offending waist, and donned the more sober apparel of the campers. The boys exclaimed at her change of appearance, but she said she had been too fine for berry-bushes, and as they had the necessary tin pails, they were just starting for the pine walk, when Mrs. Bruce called :

“I thought you were to wait for company?”

“No,” said Hilda ; “we did not promise, and it will be hot, I’m afraid. Besides, he probably only said it to be polite. Who ever heard of a man picking berries who did not have to?”

So off they started. The cottage was so nearly surrounded by the lake, that there was only one end connecting it with the mainland ; this was covered with pine-trees, some old and bending towards the lake, where the water close to the bank

was washing against their roots, some straight and tall, among which the children had a swing and some seats. The walk through the pines led them into a more open space, past what they called the lower landing, a sandy beach, and on up the hill, where were situated the other cottages of the camp. Mrs. Bruce's cottage being rather off from the rest, they were much more by themselves and less often called upon, or rather run in upon, than if they had been on the regular line of travel up the hill from the landing. There were only five families, and every means was taken to make the camp continue as plain and primitive as it was originally, five years before, when the organization was started.

To the berry-patch,—as they called the mountain-side, that was covered with blackberries at this time of the year and equally covered with raspberries and

huckleberries earlier—was not a long walk, and the children soon filled their pails and helped Hilda, whom they called lazy this morning, for somehow she found more pleasant seats to rest in, more curious stones than usual to look at and worked with less than her accustomed zeal, but at last everything was full and they started for home. “Let’s go by the spring, Aunt Hilda,” Bobby said; “I’m awful thirsty.” And so, around the hill, by a spring that came down to the lake as it rounded in by the side of the house, they went. From there they could see the cottage across the land, which, when the water was high, was covered at times deep enough to row around to the kitchen door. Mrs. Bruce stood at the head of the steps waving her hand, and near her stood a figure the children called that “last-night big man.” He left her as he saw them, and going down the steps got into his boat, rowed rapidly

across the little bay to near where they were, and joining them, said reproachfully :

“Miss Ward, why didn’t you wait for me? I really wasn’t late.” Not waiting for an answer, he told them all to get in his boat and they would take the berries home that way. Mrs. Bruce came down the steps for the pails as they pulled up to them, and Bobby wanted to get out ; he didn’t want to sit on a seat with Wally and, besides, there was Joe in the sand and he was going to make a house with him ; so out he got, and Mr. Scanning pulled off after saying “half an hour,” to Mrs. Bruce’s remark that they must not be out long as it was lunch-time now.

He rowed silently for a time then, looking at Hilda, who, after the fashion of women, was dragging her hand in the water, said, “Did you forget I was coming, Miss Hilda? You don’t mind my using

your first name, do you? I always liked it, you know." He waited for an answer to both questions, but it was some time before one came; then Hilda said, "No, I don't mind," and became silent again. After waiting again, Scanning laughed, and said, "Well, I must be satisfied I suppose, but it's a little hard on a man, who has thought of nothing all night but picking berries, to have his party run off without him and then to be told no one knows in exactly which direction they have gone and, when found, to be snubbed as I am being."

"I am sure I didn't mean to snub you, and I would have waited if I had really thought you meant to come. Are you going to land? you pull so near the shore."

"Do I? I didn't see where we were going."

"Oh!" exclaimed Wally, "do let's get out on the island; we are so near, and I'll see if my funny red lizard is in the house

we made for him. Don't you remember, Aunt Hilda?" So land they did, and the older ones, sitting down on a rock at one end of the little island, talked of the lake and shore, and how delightful a house would be on this very spot, while Walter found his lizard had departed somehow, though there was no apparent door to the house of sand and stones. Hilda would not trust him a step from her side only where the water seemed shallow and there was a beach and, listening to their talk, he said :

"Do you live at the Fishs', where the bears are?" Mr. Scanning promised to take him over some day to see them—two tame young bears caught the winter before. "Is your wife there, too?" Wally asked, with the directness of childhood. "Mamma said you were old enough to have a wife."

Scanning laughed a hearty, deep laugh,

and taking the little fellow on his knee, asked ·

“Why, how old do you think I am?”

Walter didn't know, but thought he must be older than his father, as “Papa has only one white spot on his head, in the back, where there isn't any hair, but you have white hair all over your head.”

George Scanning passed his hand mechanically over his thick hair, which was well sprinkled with white, and told Wally that his Aunt Hilda knew how old he was, for years and years ago she knew him when there were no white spots, and to ask her.

Hilda was digging out some grass growing between the rocks, leaning down on her elbow away from him, and, without raising her head, she said she was as ignorant of one thing as the other, his age and his wife.

“Good Heavens! did you suppose I

was married? Come, isn't it time to be going?" and, taking Walter on his shoulder, he started for the boat, only waiting to see Hilda arise from the rock. As he took her hand to help her in, he held it a moment, saying: "Somehow, I never thought for a moment that you were married, any more than it occurred to me you might suppose I was. Thank God, we are not!" in a half whisper, as she went forward to her seat in the stern.

Mrs. Bruce, being one of the women who think life is pleasanter if eating is not treated as if it were a thing to be done only in the presence of her family and with doors closed to the rest of the world, unless especially invited, kept Mr. Scanning to lunch, though lunch was dinner, and dinner also combined the best qualities of both meals. There was little trouble about keeping him: he took things as a matter of course, and was easily enter-

tained. After the meal they lounged on the piazza in hammocks, till driven by the sun into the pleasant log sitting-room, where hammocks and easy-chairs made lounging a delightful way to pass the time.

It was nearly sunset when their guest left. He had passed the afternoon as they had ; watched the bathers, lying on the bank at Hilda's feet ; talked over their stock of books, of which there were plenty for a two months' supply ; tried a new boat, brought around for Mrs. Bruce to see by one of the natives,—all the time conscious of a pleasure and enjoyment that watching Hilda and being near her gave him. He had said the night before to himself, as he rowed across the lake: "She is changed some ; the tongue, that I remember as being too sharp, seems gentler now ; but is that all ? Can it be she was as lovely then as she seems now ?

Or, perhaps I ought to say lovable ; yes, that just describes her, lovable." And as he smoked his last cigar, and as he lay awake watching the light in the sky through his little window,—an unusual thing for him to be awake at all at night,—thoughts of the quiet, sweet face, of the little hand which felt so soft in his, and of the restful figure danced through his brain ; and in the morning, as he prepared to row across the lake, he acknowledged to himself : " Well, I've got the first symptoms badly ; but as I've often gone this far and no farther, I'll see what comes of it."

To-night, he did not think at all ; it was more a consciousness of her and a feeling of content, of happiness, that only became restlessness when morning made it possible for him to again start for the camp. He remembered she had said she was to go on a tramp with the other campers, and so tried to content himself, taking his gun

and going over the mountains on a tramp that lasted till past noon. He was greeted, as he neared the house, with the intelligence that: "One of them durned bears had got loose and hidden itself somewhere." Though rather sympathizing with the bear, he good-naturedly offered to help hunt for it after dinner, for Ben, the only male creature about the house,—his father having gone off with a party almost as soon as their return from their unsuccessful hunt of the night before,—was of not the least use for anything; his laziness was so deep-rooted and so all-over a quality, that his tongue was the only member of his body that had the least activity, and it went a way of its own.

The bear was finally found behind a barrel in a shed, not three feet from the chain which had held it, but as Ben had not looked for it, and Mr. Scanning supposed all the premises near had been

searched, their quest extended through the woods before they thought of looking near the house.

The afternoon was rather slow in passing; he knew they would not be back from their climb before evening, so didn't go over to the cottage till then. Why didn't he manage to go with them?" he kept asking himself; "of course, he could have managed it if he hadn't been such a fool as not to ask." He speculated a good deal about his feelings, as he lay in an old hammock under the trees; but it wasn't a very pleasant subject in some ways, and he decided he'd only stay a day or two longer.

He didn't, however, succeed in getting any conversation with Hilda that evening. All the campers were together, and he had to content himself as best he could with a chance word, and with noticing how bright and sweet she was. He wouldn't leave

to-morrow ; a few days wouldn't make any difference. It couldn't be he was falling in love with a girl he had flirted with years ago and gone and left for new scenes with scarcely a regret, though he remembered he had several times thought of writing to her, till—well, there had been plenty of things to see and do, and he supposed he had had rather a gay life, until two or three years ago, when Gertrude and he—but, hang it all ! he wouldn't think of that. This girl, going back to the subject engrossing him now, was different from anyone he had ever met. When does not a man falling in love think this ?

There was just enough remembrance to sweeten the charm and add interest to the spell that was being cast over him, all unconsciously by the object of it.

CHAPTER V.

Oh ! there is a sweetness in the mountain air
And life, that bloated ease can never hope to share.

BYRON.

The next day Mr. Scanning found half the camp were off to the village; they were to row down the lake and walk the rest of the way. Hilda and Mrs. Bruce had already started, rowing the large boat with two pairs of oars, and he found he could make no arrangement to increase his boatload except by Bobby. He had several errands necessary to be done, he said, and would like to join the party. The morning was beautiful and they were all in the gayest of spirits. The lawyer was in his most social mood; the clergyman the jolliest of the jolly; the doctor, a guest of one of the cottagers, laughed with the

rest; the widow, who called herself the grandmother of the camp, was younger than any of them. Her boatload would only accompany the others down the lake, then they would walk up through the woods and help with the endless supplies to be carried, and would wait at the Potato Cottage.

The wood walk was delightful,—cool, damp and springy to the feet, and they all had that delightful feeling of uncertainty as to the right direction, that gave it added interest. They emerged from the shade into a half-cleared field, full of cattle feeding, and reached a cottage, called by the boys, “Potato Cottage.” A large patch of that useful vegetable was in full view; for a “clearing” in the mountains literally verifies its name—there is never a tree left for shade or for hiding. Here was delicious spring water for refreshment, and each one had to drink

before taking to the highway, where a quarter of a mile walk brought them to the village. Everyone in the Adirondacks calls a place large enough to have a store "The Corners." Here there was a post-office, a store where the owner challenged anyone to name any article for comfort or luxury that he did not keep or could not supply, and a tall hotel, where the stages stopped on their way to and from White Mountain. There was also a barber to be found for the seeking, but as his services were not often required, the seeking often took a long time and led one into odd places.

It was not a pretty place. A long, straggling, up and down sort of street, with houses always being affected more or less seriously by the mountain fires, and being as constantly renewed, always in less picturesque style, for there was ever a new effort to be more like cities and towns

and with no success in copying their attractions.

It was pleasant on the hotel piazza, and as it took some time for all their wants to be supplied, the party met there. They had all congregated, except the two little boys, who were excited over some puppies at the store. Bobby came running over with one in his arms, a little fluffy black ball, of the cocker spaniel breed, only a few weeks old, but so bright and funny that he was perfectly irresistible.

"Oh, Muzzie! Muzzie!" he exclaimed, "get him for me; can't I have him?"

Bobby begged and begged, first with eyes dancing, and then filling with tears. The doctor didn't like dogs, and asked as he saw Mrs. Bruce wavering: "Are you going to humor that boy? Why, the thing will be a perfect nuisance." But Scanning saw Hilda pet the little fellow, and thought that she seemed as fond of dogs as the

children. He disappeared, and coming back, said :

"Bobby, the dog is your's and Wally's ; now mind you share him."

"Did you give five dollars?" asked Bobby.

"Bobby," with a knowing look, "there are business transactions that will not bear the light of investigation. Keep the dog to remember me when I'm miles away," glancing at Hilda. "Ask Miss Hilda to name him, and don't let him bite you after he gets old enough to have better manners."

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" and Bobby danced around with his new treasure in his arms ; then Wally had a turn and the dog was in danger of being choked to death.

Hilda mischievously suggested that they would name him for the doctor, that Teddy would be a nice nickname for

Edward, and that perhaps then he would learn to love him. The doctor looked disgusted and walked off. They finally decided on "Scamp," being, Bobby said, "just a tiny bit like Scanning" and very characteristic of the puppy's actions.

"Miss Hilda," Mr. Scanning said, as he walked by her side on the homeward journey, "I'm glad it was not you who favored 'Scamp,' and suggested it as a nickname of mine; the worst thing about it is that it's horribly applicable. I don't want you to believe it, and yet I am just now contemplating enrolling myself in the great number of that profession who roam the earth. Are you ever bad enough to just shut your eyes and go on in a way that you know is—well, say dishonorable?"

"Yes," said Hilda; "but you can't always keep your eyes shut."

She was thinking how she had not been decided enough when Mr. Shephard had

said he would wait. She forgot that she had thought then that she might possibly feel differently ; it seemed as if she had always known it to be impossible.

“ Mr. Scanning, the way you are swinging that bag of beans will make them come to grief, I’m sure,” for he was letting one of the bags he carried come in contact with the bushes at every turn. “ I really think,” she added, “ that dreadful sarsaparilla has gone to your head, the way you walk.”

“ No,” looking directly at her, “ it isn’t the sarsaparilla that has gone to my head.”

“ Oh !” she exclaimed, “ can’t you get me that lovely fungus ?” And she halted by an old tree which had an unusually white growth on it. Her companion, regardless of the beans, threw the bag down, and together they succeeded in loosening the fungus without any injury. But, alas ! they had not reckoned on the

dog. He had broken the string and had investigated the bag of beans in true puppy fashion, and finding them great fun, had scattered them around in every direction. The boys—much like dogs in what they enjoy—were looking on laughingly. Fortunately, one of the party had a newspaper, and most of the beans were recovered and folded in it, but not till Mr. Scanning, who had been searching for each bean, had made the boys laugh again, and had dreadfully provoked Hilda by saying, as he took her hand once, “I beg your pardon, I thought it another white bean.” She turned away, saying: “This is a case of too much zeal; I’ll give up.” He looked at her so penitently and asked, with plenty of fun in his face, too: “Won’t you forgive me? I’m sure it isn’t half as bad to hear such a flat speech as it is to have made it,” that she could only join in the laugh and tell him she supposed it wasn’t.

The lawyer, a fine geologist, had turned back to show them a curious stone he had found, and while he was talking to Hilda, Mr. Scanning turned to Bobby, and said :

“ Bobby, don't you want to row back in my little boat? Get your mother to change, that's a good boy ; she can row you, and I'll take the big boat ; you can keep the dog, you know, he isn't heavy.”

Bobby, like all children, preferred anything that gave him a feeling of danger and risk, and the smaller the boat the greater this sensation ; so, after telling his mother of the plan and his wish for it, he proceeded to see how wet he could get himself and the dog in a puddle by the lake before embarking.

“ Why, Hilda,” said Mrs. Bruce, “ do you want to row the large boat with Mr. Scanning? Didn't we get along nicely this morning together ?”

Not having heard anything of the new arrangement, Hilda was astonished ; but before she could reply Scanning looked at her beseechingly, and said : “ Miss Ward and I want to try our stroke together, Mrs. Bruce, if you’ll consent. You’ll find my boat light and easy.”

Mrs. Bruce could see a thing that was thrust in her face as well as most people, and as they were the last of the party, she let Scanning help her and Bobby and the dog in his boat, and left Hilda and Wally to come with him.

Wally had objected ; he didn’t see why Bobby should have all the good things,—the dog and the smaller boat,—but was comforted somewhat, by being told he could have the puppy to sleep with that night, and by being given a bag of crackers “ for his very own.” Mr. Scanning certainly looked pleased, very much pleased.

“ Miss Hilda,” he said, as he helped her pass him, “ you don’t need to row ; I can do it.”

“ But you said you wanted to see how well we could pull together,” she looked surprised—“ and row I will,” she added, as she caught a laughing look and saw she had made a stupid speech.

They pulled up through “ Fairy Land ” and “ The Narrows ” and, as they reached Eagle Rock, Scanning said he had never been on it, so they landed and climbed up. The rock rose straight and high from the water and was quite a climb, but gave the strong man a chance to help Hilda ; and well he did his part, returning for that purpose after he had seated Walter and told him not to move. From the rock the view of the lake was beautiful ; they could see miles up its glassy surface.

“ I have just begun to feel tired ;” she

said as she sat looking across the lake, "it was quite a walk, wasn't it?"

Wally had his pockets full of crackers, and was silent and happy after having asked where the eagles were and having been told that if he sat very still he should hear a story about eagles that very night, a real fairy story with brownies in it; and when do fatigue and scenery prevent a small boy from eating crackers?

"I'll not let you row another stroke," said Scanning. "I must take care of you; it's the mission of old friends. I was very forgetful to bring you up here; but it's pleasant, isn't it?" looking into her eyes with an expression that brought the quick color to her face. "I would like a house on this very rock," he continued; "it is such a dizzy height. I'd not care how the wind blew; I'd forget the world and let it forget me. Wouldn't it be a grand life, Miss Hilda? Wouldn't you like it?"

"I don't know," was all she answered, sitting with her head resting on her hand as she leaned over sidewise.

"But," he persisted, "you could write stories to your heart's content, and put in such a wealth of happiness that the world would dub you great indeed. Wouldn't you like it?"

"You're absurd. I would grow just like the Fish's and the rest of the natives; think of their drawling speech, their leather-like skins, and the way they have of never being in a hurry about anything; they always say they'll 'set about it soon now,' and then any time will do. Horrible! how would you like that?" Lightly adding, "Mary will think we are drowned; we must go."

She didn't row home. Scanning took her oars and put them under the seat, and declared he was only delayed and put back by her efforts. "But it's been a jolly

day, hasn't it?" he said as he bade her good-bye. "I'll make up to Mrs. Bruce for the beans some time, and there is the dog to keep you company, if you are any of you lonesome till I can come over again; this evening, probably."

It was early evening when he rowed around the point on which was Windward Cottage, for not seeing anyone on the piazza or rocks, he went on to the lower landing. There was quite a group assembled there, deep in conversation with some guides, and he was greeted by Bobby with, "Hello! we're going to Squaw Lake to-morrow," and that turned out to be what the conversation was about; arrangements were being made, and as Scanning landed, he asked Hilda, going at once to her side, whether there wouldn't be room for him. "Let me row you and one of the children; I am quite equal to it, I assure you," he said eagerly. But it

was decided that, as they had spoken to two guides, they would take them both, and add him to the party, if he really wished it. Mrs. Bruce said that she would keep both the boys with her and, if Mr. Scanning liked, he could go with Hilda, having old Flanders row them. "Flanders" looked, Scanning thought, as if he might need help; he was old and gray and a character. He said, "If it was a noice day,"—drawling out the "nice" as if it were spelled with an "o,"—"they needn't start 'til nigh unter half-past seven; he'd be around about that time." Then he put his knife slowly in his pocket, for he had been whittling all the time, stuck the stick he had been working on in his mouth and sauntered off.

As they walked to the cottage, Mr. Scanning said to Hilda: "You have not said whether you wanted me or not. Have I thrust myself too confidently in

your party?" He stooped to look into the girl's face and saw only a pretty pink cheek turned away from him. "Look out for the old Indian's cellar," she said, as he stumbled in a hole, supposed to have held the foundations of the hut of that early settler. George Scanning was provoked. No man likes to stumble, nor does he like to have a girl, to whom he has just said something to which he wants a sentimental answer, laugh, as Hilda did, a low, sweet laugh, which still showed in her face, as she looked up at him, and said :

"Mr. Scanning, do you know when you are so humble about going, that you will have to sit on the middle seat, and how uncomfortable you'll be?"

"Do you know," looking her directly in the eyes, and stooping so as to continue doing so, "that if I am near you I cannot be uncomfortable?"

He had accomplished what he wished ;

a wave of color came over her face, which was still turned to his, and as Hilda walked on he saw her lips quiver and press themselves more closely together.

She was very quiet all the evening. A party of cottagers joined them around the fire-place, where it was just cool enough to start a fire of logs. Hilda sang with the rest, and without actually avoiding their guests, she did not directly address him, nor sit near enough to be spoken to. When he said good-night, after the others had left, he added softly :

“ May I feel you are really glad I am going ?” and she answered lightly :

“ We are very glad ; if it is a ‘ noice ’ day,” mimicing the guide, “ it will be a pleasant row ; good-night.”

CHAPTER VI.

I cannot tell what you say, green leaves,
I cannot tell what you say ;
But I know that there is a spirit in you,
And a word in you this day.

KINGSLEY.

Why do incongruous ideas jostle each other in our thoughts, as people do in life, and serious and farcical facts do in events? There was the girl who said stewed kidneys—of which she was particularly fond—always reminded her by their odor of a funeral she had attended, where the dead person, at her own request, was dressed as in life and lying on a lounge, instead of in a coffin ; she added, however, that the memory was lost sight of when she began to eat the kidneys.

There is no better illustration of the

incongruities of life, than that Hilda Ward, as she came down to the beach the morning of their excursion, should have in her mind, side by side with anticipations of pleasure, the memory of a clever Englishman telling her of an undertaker's wife, who was also his assistant, who had reminded her of one of Dickens' stories by describing this woman as coming in the room "reeking with the bodies she had just left, and messing about the dinner."

Something aromatic in the flowers at the funeral may have accounted for that association of ideas, and something fishy in the odor of lake water when a storm is brewing for the memory of the Englishman's ghoulish remark, for though the sun was shining fitfully there seemed rain in the air; however, they decided not to change their plans, as Flanders looked knowingly at the sky and said the storm was "a going to hold off," and he seemed

old enough to know better than they did. Bobby was naughty ; Mrs. Bruce almost wished she had not resolved never to chastise him, for since the time she slapped his hand for persisting in abusing a book, and he had looked at the little offending member and then at her, and said tearfully, "I did not hurt you," she had determined it would be the last time she would hurt him that way ; but he was very trying and, as she always kept her children to herself under such circumstances, she rejoiced that both the boys were to go in her boat.

Flanders had, at Hilda's suggestion, arranged the yoke and a board in the middle seat so that it was really comfortable, and as there was a short carry between the two lakes, they did not take more wraps than were necessary. Flanders said, when they reached the end of the lake, that there was a "noice, pleasant

stream " at the head of Squaw Lake, and if they had time, he'd row them up a way. No spelling can describe the way he drawled his words and the deliberation of his speech. He told them he "hadn't never seen no woman he'd ask to marry him; guessed he could cook viduals as well as the best of them; it mouit be he'd pick up one soume day." Hilda sat facing him, and wondered, as she looked at his wrinkled, grizzly face, and the few discolored teeth chewing the usual stick, what kind of a woman would be "picked up." In fact, Flanders did most of the talking, and if he thought at all, may have wondered at his rather silent boatload. As Hilda glanced at the other man, facing her also, at his smooth brown face,—for Mr. Scanning had grown vain enough to keep shaved somehow, probably by Mr. Fish at first, who claimed he could do anything, and then at the Corners yester-

day,—at the faultlessly neat attire which was well-fitting though suitable, the clear deep-set eyes and thick short hair, sprinkled with grey, the strong, large, handsome hands and straight figure and well-set head, she felt a sort of thankfulness that she belonged to the class that had in it such men, rather than the one represented by the slouching, distasteful, ignorant creature also opposite.

Squaw Lake, Hilda had never seen, and it proved well worth a journey under doubtful skies and over turbulent waters. Only prevented from being round by the shores bending in and out to make delightful little nooks and points, it was not over ten miles long, with its densely wooded banks only broken in one place, by the hotel. This hotel was in true Adirondack style; logs, piazzas, additions and all, told of the first pioneers, their clearings, their life, their ambition. Having

enjoyed the abundant dinner, which had been added to a table already set out with doughnuts, honey, pickles, cookies and nuts, they started down the hill—for there is always a hill where there is a lake—intending to explore the “noice, pleasant stream,” before starting for home. Bobby, who was always the unlucky one, got his feet wet, slid in the mud and catching on Hilda’s dress, made her step also in the soft, wet earth. This little mishap prevented them from noticing that Wally, who had been sent back for the forgotten wraps, had deposited them all under the seat of the boat he had come in, and also made them decide to give up the row on the lake’s inlet, for Mr. Scanning insisted that Hilda, at least, should return to the hotel and dry her shoes and stockings. Men always take better care of themselves than women, and as soon as they are inter-

ested in any one of the opposite sex, want her to follow their rules of health.

"Can't your wife wear a pair of my shoes, if you are afraid of her taking cold?" asked the daughter of the house, of Mr. Scanning, as he explained why they wanted to sit in the kitchen awhile.

She was a tall, pale, overworked-looking girl, who had seemed much interested in the whole party, as she waited on them and joined in the conversation at dinner.

Mr. Scanning, with a smile at Hilda, said he thought it scarcely necessary.

Hilda, finding he did not correct the mistake, realized afterwards how awkward it would be to break in on a conversation with the declaration that she was not his wife, for he and the daughter were interested in questions and answers about the quaint kitchen, which was half sitting-room for the family and was papered with newspapers, more or less old, left by

departing guests. She felt intensely indignant at her companion for talking and laughing as he was doing while she was resenting the whole situation.

Mrs. Bruce had a theory, many-times confirmed, that wet shoes were better dried on, or rather the wearer suffered no harm from that treatment, and as Bobby was well protected, they had stayed on the beach, where the boys had found plenty of amusement playing with some tiny fish, which they had caught and placed in a tin can, which had been used for bait.

"How could you let her think such a thing?" Hilda exclaimed as they were returning down the hill.

"In the words of poor Pillicoddy: 'Why dispel the agreeable delusion?' That girl had an astonishing idea of the fitness of things. Why, if I live to be a hundred, I shall never forget my feeling of delight as she said to me, after you had gone out of

the door, 'I hope your wife won't ketch cold.'" Mr. Scanning looked down laughingly and seemed to really be, as he said, very happy.

"I am glad, I am sure, that anything so perfectly preposterous can find a person so foolish as to laugh at it. You are easily amused." Hilda was angry at him—angry at herself for showing it,—and ready to cry at—she didn't know what, and she hurried on. In this case anger went before a fall, for just before reaching the boats she stepped on a log to jump down, and instead of jumping, slid down on her knees. Mr. Scanning drew her gently up and held her a moment, with one arm partly around her, and, speaking close to her ear, said :

"Don't be angry with me ; let me have the joy of the name of having what the actual possession of would seem too much to hope for." His eyes, serious enough

now, looked for a moment into her's and, with a feeling of dismay at having introduced the subject, came one of relief, as Bobby ran up, exclaiming: "Aunt Hilda, I'se dry and your guide says we got to start for home, for it's lowery. I guess that means rain, don't it?"

They were off and it was "lowery." Mrs. Bruce had a young oarsman and soon left the other boat far behind, and, waving her hand as if for good-bye, they did not see them again. At the carry, Hilda found a paper pinned on a tree, saying they would not wait, for Walter did not seem well, and as they walked Indian file through the woods, she had that sense of coming excitement that sometimes precedes an event we would gladly put off or not encounter.

George Scanning would put off nothing at all, except his conscience; that he would close his eyes and ears and memory to.

It was enough for him that the girl walking ahead was dearer to him than any one had ever been, that he knew now that she affected him as no one else had ever done, and that the present was full of joy. He would not think—time enough for that. How dainty she was; how sweet; and he could just see the little ear that had been so close to him a moment ago. Yes, it would be close again; he felt strong to conquer, and yet humble as to his merits. Was he too dull, too rough, too big? Would she like him, love him? But if she should—here he shook his broad shoulders and with an impatient movement, called out: “Miss Hilda, where are the shawl and mackintosh? I haven’t them.”

And no one knew. Hilda remembered Walter going for them, but that was all; and Flanders, passing them with his boat

on his shoulders, said he "'lowed they 're in Ged's boat," and on he went.

The worst of it was that it was beginning to drizzle, fine and slight as yet, but the wind was rising and they had at least an eight-mile row to the cottage. Hilda, being somewhat of the "Mark Tapley" order, said: "Never mind; she wasn't cold, and what if she did get a little wet? the rain made the woods smell so sweet she wished they were to walk all the way through them,"

Three miles and it rained, really rained. Flanders sat like a stoic; the rain dropped from his hat on his old shoulders and he seemed to not know the difference between it and sunshine. He "'lowed it would be near dark before they got home."

CHAPTER VII.

Sweet, good-night!

This bud of love, by summer's ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet.

"Gracious Heavens!" exclaimed Scanning and he gave a low whistle as Flanders hit a floating log and snap went his oar. What were they to do? The wind was blowing against them, and to attempt paddling would be to make no progress at all.

"I'll get inter shore and then, if you kin wait, I'll walk over to Jim King's and git an oar, 'taint more'n a couple of miles," and they saw no other way than to do this. He paddled them in, slow enough work, and Scanning scrambled up the shore, half pulling his companion, while Flanders drew up the boat, tramped the bushes down as well as possible and turned it

half over against a tree for protection for the two left behind while he started on his walk. Hilda suggested their all going, but the woods were so thick that the walk for a woman would have been hard enough, and she had to give up and seat herself under the sheltering boat. As Mr. Scanning sat down beside her, he felt her shiver, a fact she tried to conceal by saying :

“Isn’t this fun? Let us fancy ourselves aborigines and quite used to this sort of rather cramped quarters;” but the chatter of her teeth was quite perceptible to her companion. He took off his coat, a heavy one, but all he had, and placed it over her shoulders.

“I will not take it,” Hilda declared. “The idea of your sitting there with no coat and my having two. I’m not cold,—only a little wet and shivery,—take it back.” But he would not, and she was

almost reduced to tears. He said he would walk about; but after a few moments came back and said he hoped it was the clear-up shower, it rained hard enough.

“Mr. Scanning, I’ll get up and walk into the lake if you don’t take your coat.”

“Will you let me suggest a compromise; you see, I hate to give up, and it is big enough for two. How can I let you shiver again? Will you not share it with me?” And, sitting close to her, he threw the coat she had taken off over both their shoulders; but it was no use, it only half did its duty.

“Hilda, will you not trust me? Do you remember saying years ago that some people inspired you with perfect trust?” And he put his arm around her and drew her to him till the little shivering form was in his arms and her head against his shoulder; then, with the other hand, he

drew the coat over both of them, buttoning it on his vest, and holding the other side around her.

The girl seemed stunned after the first "Oh!" She neither moved nor spoke for some moments, till arousing herself with an effort, she faintly suggested that she could hold her side of the coat, and Scanning made no objection. He, too, was silent; but she could feel his arm tighten around her, and his heart beat quick and strong against her head.

"Hilda, don't," as he heard a little sob. "Hear the wind, it is clearing; are you not warm?"

Was it the wind made his voice shake? With the generosity of true manliness he began to talk of things far removed from them. He felt that to take any advantage of a situation made necessary, would be unworthy of the trust she was placing in him, and so he told her of a trip he had

once made on this very lake, when his boat drifted off after he had left it, and the walk of miles he had to take. He told her of his uncle's home in England. He asked her of her trip abroad with her father. But Hilda could only reply in monosyllables ; all its activity had left the tongue, busy enough at other times with descriptions of her trip. She remembered afterwards, when sorrow had made each memory precious, that he never spoke of his cousin. His uncle and aunt, the pretty park, the horses and drives, its nearness to London, the view from a favorite hill ; on and on he talked, the deep, low voice entering into her very soul, and making it impossible for her ever again to be the girl to whom her father and friends and her work were her greatest interests.

As she sat quivering beneath his touch, listening to the voice so close to her ear, she seemed some other person, or as if

infinite depths of feeling and possibilities were for the first time born in her nature ; possibilities of joy—with their ever-following possibilities of sorrow.

And what of him ? He could restrain himself from declaring his feelings only by gently pressing his lips now and then on her hair, by keeping his hand tightly clasped on the boat's edge, by rushing on from one subject to another. What he talked of he could not recall afterwards ; he only knew, that all the strength of a man's passion, that of a man who had reached years when passion had accumulated force, had concentrated itself, was clamoring for expression. With the most intense joy, was the almost agony of suppression. He must keep her from fully realizing where she was ; keep her interested. He must not shorten by one moment of consciousness the joy of having her so close to him ; he must not let her know he

thought of it in any way but as an accident made necessary for their mutual advantage. His heart beat fast near the dear head; his arm held her gently but firmly to him.

Hilda, for months afterwards, could close her mental eyes, become unconscious of her surroundings, and smell again the damp woods and the faint mannish odor of cigar smoke and linen. The greatest joy is not always in the present; what the present is, often makes greater joy of memory.

A loud, "Halloo! Be you dead?" came like a thunder-clap to the two people who had forgotten Flanders, oars—everything but themselves. As Scanning took his arm and coat from around the startled girl, he could not help raising her face to his and pressing his lips on her forehead; then, with "Have you got a shawl for Miss Ward, Flanders?" he turned the

boat and helped carry it to the lake, leaving Hilda with the greatest consideration to herself. The shawl was a warm one, the rain was very light now, and as Mr. Scanning helped her in the boat he said they would have quite a comfortable row the rest of the way, and they did. His walk or a drop of creature comfort which he evidently had been treated to, added to the guide's strength, and it was not very dark when they reached the rocks. Flanders had done all the talking with Mr. Scanning, who seemed in a happy mood, as if he, too, had had the best of cheer, and Mrs. Bruce could see, by the lantern the boys brought to the boat, that her friend's face was very pale and that she seemed scarcely able to walk up the steps to the piazza. Mr. Scanning muttered something incoherently about taking care of herself, —that he would see that the shawl was returned and, amid Mrs. Bruce's regrets

about the wraps, said good-night and was rowed off.

Like the wise woman she was, Mary Bruce asked few questions. She just coddled her friend, giving her a nice little meal, made no remarks about her silence during the evening, as she lay in the hammock in the corner of the room, and said good-night with a lingering kiss, when Hilda said she was tired and went up stairs, not to sleep though for a long time, but to toss about feverishly with all the excitement of many new sensations.

CHAPTER VIII.

Let me get
Her for myself, and what's the earth
With all its art, verse, music, mirth—
Compared with love, found, gained and kept?
BROWNING.

For days Hilda tossed about unable to leave her bed; for who can tell why the same exposure will affect the same person differently at different times, and Hilda had caught a cold. It was several days before she could come down stairs and feel strong enough to sit on the piazza. As she tried to be content, with fever and aches and cough, through her head kept running the stories she had written; the few love stories, one especially, where a simple country girl had supposed that a man, much older and of greater experi-

ence, loved her ; and she laughed and shuddered as she recalled it. How immature it was,—how little able had she been to describe love in any of its characteristics ; how poor the work seemed to her now in the light of her own feelings. And, as she looked at the water-lilies Mr. Scanning had sent her, it seemed as if, should she ever write again, he, and he alone, would figure in her stories as all in life that could mean love, all that was worth loving ; and then she burned all over with dismay, as she remembered her love was given where she had little reason to believe it was thought of any value.

It was a beautiful sunset and, as she sat looking up the lake alone,—having insisted she was no longer an invalid and that the boys should go out with their mother for a row,—it seemed as if the West was all on fire with beauty ; and the water catching the reflection answered back with glow

for glow. Her heart beat almost to suffocation as her companion on the unfortunate excursion leaped over the low railing and, kneeling at her feet, drew her towards him with a half smothered :

“Dearest, dearest, I have you again ; I could not wait ! I love you ; you know I love you !”

The pine-trees moaned and sighed, the water gently came and went, the light faded out of the sky and little they heeded it all. He had seated himself, and taking her slight figure in his arms had so gathered her to him that they could talk in half-whispers :

“I think I’ve always loved you, though I did not know it.” And for that sweet speech her lover covered her lips with his, and drank in the rapture they could give him, and she felt drawn to him with a love of the strength of which she had never dreamed. She nestled closer, and putting

her hand over the again approaching mouth, said :

“How did you know I was alone? and what if I hadn't been?”

“I met Mrs. Bruce. Oh, love, let me just once again; think of all the days since I saw your dear little face, precious face!”—holding it up and letting his eyes feast on every love-lit feature. “You are mine, are you not? Old fellow as I am, I never knew before what love was like. Darling, are you well again? I forgot to ask for joy of seeing you. You are rosy enough, but you are so slight; it seems as if you were not so much of an armful as you were in the woods. How I wanted to tell you I loved you that day, but was afraid of frightening you; and I did not imagine the ‘always’ that you have loved me. I know you love me now—say it again, dear. Do I hold you so you cannot speak? Am I crushing you?”

"Must I talk?" a little voice said. "I think I am too happy. I have felt like talking so many times, but now there is no room for any feeling but that you love me—and how good you are." At the last sentence, Hilda felt the strong man shrink and looked up to see an expression which made her ask:

"What is it; am I getting very heavy?"

"No, no, sit still, don't struggle so; you cannot go; I will hold you forever and will forget all the world besides," and again he kissed her passionately. "Dear," after a long silence, "the others are coming, must I go? Let me stay by you as long as I can. I will not go till you send me off. I never will leave you again."

Mrs. Bruce knew, of course she did! Any woman would have understood just how it was; but, as they said nothing, she only told Hilda she ought to come in, and took herself off to put the children to bed,

leaving her guests, one in a hammock, the other by its side, in the log-room, lighted by a fragrant fire of balsam boughs and pine-knots from the old forest trees. She could hear their low voices, hear her friend's happy little laugh, hear her lover's deep tones, and, as she came down the stairs, she supposed Hilda must have told him he could smoke, or asked him why he didn't, for she heard him say as he bent towards her .

“I cannot put a cigar to my lips to-night, after—” She could not hear the rest, but what woman could not have guessed it !

Days of glorious sunshine followed. To love, to be loved is the whole of human happiness. Thank God, that at whatever age it comes and finds us, it is as new and as delicious as if the sensation had never been felt before, as if the world for long ages had not been full of it. The differ-

ence, perhaps, between receiving the love gift after youth's first bloom is worn off, or having it come when the first steps are being taken towards womanhood and manhood, is that, if it comes in more mature years, the happiness of it is fully realized, the beauty, the delight is vividly felt, one knows well the emptiness of life before love and the changes it has wrought.

George Scanning was a perfect lover ; if being perfect in that role meant absolute devotion. He was never willingly absent from the girl to whom he had given his whole heart, and they rambled off together for whole mornings, roved away for all the long afternoons, for, like most men in love, he wanted the object of it all to himself. Even the camp-fire, enjoyed by all the camp, was less to him than the others, for he had in a measure to share Hilda with her friends.

“George,” Hilda asked one day as,

seated against a beautiful white beech, she leaned over him as he lazily lay with his head on her knees and his hand holding hers over his head: "Were you never engaged before?"

He dropped her hand and covered his eyes, and after a pause replied: "Why do you ask, sweetheart? I'm engaged fast enough now, am I not? Do you see that bird above us? I have been watching her and think she must have a nest near."

"But, George, were you ever really? I think you were; did she jilt you?"

"Would to God she had!" he muttered. "I'll tell you all about it, some day; let's be happy now and think only of ourselves. You blessed little woman, I wonder why I love you so well. That doesn't sound exactly flattering, but I mean it only as to how it came about that I can love as I do. I thought the thing had always been exag-

gerated in the telling, but instead of that, it has never been half told." And he raised his head and looked into her face with his full of the strength of a great passion.

CHAPTER IX.

I could pass days
Stretched in the shade of those old cedar trees,
Watching the sunshine like a blessing fall.

Another day, after rowing up the lake, they landed at a trail that led into a clearing, where there was a little cabin, falling into decay, vacated long ago by some one who had grown tired, perhaps, of solitude. A flock of sheep were the only occupants of the place, and they came running forward as George and Hilda emerged from the walk. Disappointed at not seeing any signs of a meal, they retreated and left the interlopers in full possession. There was one tall oak-tree, left from the destruction of the forest, near a little stream in front of the cabin, and they seated them-

selves in its shade, or rather, George threw himself down at full length, with his arms over his head—a favorite position of his and one that displayed his somewhat unusual length of limb—and drew Hilda down beside him.

“So you wanted me to leave these enchanted waters and never know you, did you, little woman? Suppose I had; suppose I had just thought you like any common woman, not worth knowing, whom I had never seen before and never cared to see again; that is what you would have liked, is it? Was that the reason you did not claim me as an old friend? Are you sorry I rushed, or rather rowed, to you at once when I found out?”

“You know—” softly. If, as is often said, a woman makes a mistake in showing a man how well she loves him, Hilda was surely making that mistake now, for she

took no pains to hide any of the wealth of love she felt. She smoothed the thick hair from his forehead and repeated :

“ You know how glad I am. Do you know, George, Mary said you were probably married, and asked if you had your wife with you ? ”

“ Did she ? Well,” after a pause, in which he unclasped his hands and took one of hers and kissed it, “ if I had been, sweetheart, would you have loved me ? ”

“ I don't know ; I can't imagine my not loving you ; but if you were another woman's, and loved her— Do you mean would I love you if you loved another woman ? ”

“ Well, I believe men sometimes do, even in this enlightened age, love their wives ; but, if I were another woman's property as you say, had made some terrible mistake because I had not my eyes opened to my love for you, and yet, if I

did love you and did not love her, would you love me then? What would you do with all this devotion? I could not help showing it. Would you send me off, or—could you make any sacrifice of self or principle to keep me for our happiness, Hilda?"

He did not often use her name, but two or three pet terms she had learned to love. He seemed so serious for the occasion, and sitting up drew her to him and, resting her head on his breast, repeated:

"Could you, Hilda?"

His tone made her tremble as she answered:

"If you were bound to another, you could not be mine. Do you mean, let you spoil another woman's life, George?"

"No, dearest, not exactly that! But if she did not really care much, and, dear, if I loved you. See, this is love," and he kissed her (she wondered if any man had

ever kissed a woman that way before).
“Could you give me up to any woman after this?”

“If you were married! Oh, George, what do you mean?” for his earnestness almost frightened her.

“Never mind, sweetheart; I don’t mean anything; I’m not married,”—throwing himself back again on the grass, and brushing his hands over his head and eyes, as if to push away a disagreeable thought. “And whatever else there is between us, you will not let remain, will you? Do you believe in fate, dear? I half do. It must have been fated I should love you as I do, and fate that brought me here—I came very near going elsewhere, but—Why didn’t I love you years ago as I do now? It would have prevented—many things. Why didn’t you let me love you then? Strange how I drifted off; why didn’t you hold me, dear? You couldn’t

have wanted me ; if you had, we wouldn't have had to disappoint that old friend of yours, either, would we? What's his name, Shephard? Do you feel a bit of regret for him? Poor old fellow!"

"Well, he isn't old,—or at least—"

"Not older than your present slave, is that it? Now, dear, I'm sensitive on that point, don't touch it. Thirty-eight! By Jove, I don't see how you can care for such an old fellow! and to think of all the past years I should have had you for my own, wasted, some of them worse than wasted. I've not always been the best of men, little woman; my grey hairs are not perhaps all on account of age. Would you love me, could you, if you knew it all, I wonder! Such a pure little woman as you are, surely could never love a man if she knew his nature."

"I love you just as you are, because you are you. I would not have you dif-

ferent in any way. If there is anything in your past life you would wish blotted out, let us forget it as if it had never been. The present is ours, your future is mine, and I love you."

What man could ask for more! The tender eyes looked down into his, and the sensitive mouth just touched his face as he involuntarily whispered: "God bless you!"

They were very quiet for a few moments, drinking in the happiness of each other's presence. The sheep, recovering from their first disappointment and not understanding the continued invasion, returned, led by the most daring one, whom a bell had helped to make bold. They did not, however, venture across the stream, but served to remind the other occupants of their territory that there existed other creatures besides themselves, that the sun had disappeared and that they were

several miles of rowing, as well as a walk, from home. Hand-in-hand they started for the path, and as Hilda would not wear a hat unless absolutely necessary and had thrown it down long ago, of course it was forgotten and had to be gone back for. As she sat waiting for the hat and its bearer, she thought was ever girl as happy as she was; she noticed his walk, his figure, his every look, all of which seemed perfect in her eyes, and felt very sure that no one was ever so handsome, or—well, if there was, there couldn't be anyone so good, so grand and noble, and how happy she should be that no other woman stood between her and happiness, for if anyone else loved him and had a prior right, what should she do? She couldn't give him up, and yet—but she was so glad she didn't have to think about that.

Hilda gradually became conscious, as the days flew by, that one subject must

not be touched on, or that it could go no further than a touch ; that whenever she asked about her lover's cousin Gertrude, she was put off with the shortest of answers. This began at odd times, when she was alone, to make her wonder ; but then she wasn't often alone, and when with him she was too happy to have any thought, even so vague as wonder, that was not altogether satisfactory.

"Is she pretty?" she asked once as they were playing at trolling. It was only play, for he often forgot to row and she forgot to notice whether anything struck at her hook or not.

"Yes," he replied, and then there was the pause which she had learned to notice.

"Is she young and good and do you admire her?"

"Yes." Then, after a while: "She is good and young and pretty, in fact more than that, a strikingly handsome girl, and

kinder than I have ever deserved. Hilda, can you spare me a day if I can manage to leave you? I want to go to the Corners and see about some letters I think must be there. Dearest, I'll put in to shore, and if I can have you close to me, hold your hand and talk it over, perhaps I'll manage to keep to my resolution and be off to-morrow.'

Hilda felt a little lost next day. She was ashamed to own to herself how she missed the man who had become all the world to her, but there was a picnic in honor of a birthday of one of the camp-children and she gladly accompanied the party to the trout brook, which dashed and foamed over the stones on its way to the lake. It was a jolly crowd; the clergyman who was spending the summer at one of the cottages was the life of the party. He turned boy and sailed logs and waded

with the children, sang in his rich, well-trained voice everything they could think to ask him, and never once impressed on their consciousness that he was singled out to be superior to worldly ways and frivolous doings.

Tired, burned and expectant, Hilda reached Windward Cottage, not to be met as she had hoped and expected, but to receive instead a letter in an unknown but easily guessed at hand. "Then he has not come," was her thought; "this is from the village," and, with a strange feeling of sinking and dizziness, she took the letter unopened to her room.

CHAPTER X.

Who best can drink his cup of woe,
Triumphant over pain,
Who patient bears his cross below—
He follows in his train.

“Sweetheart,” the letter began, “you know I love you ; nothing I am going to tell you must or will change your knowledge of that truth. The love I have for you is so very different from, so much stronger than any feeling I have ever had for any other woman, that I know it is enduring. In some ways I think it is unselfish ; for I hate so to hurt you, and yet I must. You have called me good, and I have known how little I deserved it, and have tried to tell you, but have found it too hard. Dearest, I must leave you for a while, for I am not free. To become so

I must return to England ; for, oh ! Hilda, how I hate to tell you, it is three years since my cousin Gertrude and I agreed to marry some day. My uncle seemed to wish it, and last spring it was arranged for next Christmas-time, and, dearest, as soon as I have seen you once again, I must go over to tell them about you.

“ Hilda, I have never loved my cousin. She is in every way worthy of the love of the best of men ; but I have never had any longing for her presence, any rapture at being with her. But don't despise me ! there was no one dearer to me and—how can I explain it ?

“ The engagement had been of such long standing, and Uncle Reg was in poor health and so impatient that he spoke finally to an old friend of mine, asking him to talk to us and have it settled. It seems strange that we should have needed a go-between, but Gertrude and I had

been like brother and sister so long, that somehow Uncle Reg had become discouraged about his efforts for carrying out his plans, and Arthur is an awfully nice fellow, he almost arranged the time and all for us. Then, dearest, I became restless after it was settled and at the talk of preparation, and came away ; but, as I told you, they expect me back soon.

“Fate, or God knows what, led me to you, and you know the rest. I could no more help loving you and telling you of my love, than I could stop breathing—it was so natural. What is the spell you have cast over me? Dearest, I believe that all these years your image, though all unconsciously to myself, has kept me from giving to another woman what was to become wholly yours at last. Why was I too dull years ago to recognize you as my soul's mate? But it shall make no difference now ; I will have you to hold forever

as soon as possible. I had even thought, these last days, when I felt I could not wait, and could not risk your despising me, that I would not leave you at all, or tell you, but write and explain to them as best I could. But I could not be such a black-guard. You would not love me if I proved so ungrateful and so selfish.

“Darling, do you blame me? Do you despise me? Will you forgive me? Ah! you love me I know, and all these questions I need not ask. I will soon read their answer in your dear eyes. Sweet-heart, the friend I came in with is at White Mountain, and I have found a letter here saying he is not well and wants to see me. I will go there, to-day, tell him I am off soon for home, (you said, you know, that England should be our home,) and be with you in a few days. Let me see you on the rocks Thursday evening; I think I can be back by that time.

"Oh, dearest, if you knew how I long for you, look forward to seeing you, you would not doubt the strength of my love.

"My precious one, yours, as long as there is a forever for us.

"GEORGE SCANNING."

"Hilda, are you coming to the camp-fire?" called Mrs. Bruce, "or are you too tired." "I am coming," she mechanically answered and, rising, smoothed her hair, and in the same perfectly unconscious way made other preparations.

"Is Mr. Scanning going to be over to-night?" two or three asked during the evening, and to each Hilda replied quite naturally: "No, he has gone to White Mountain to see a friend." Years of habit produce their effect. "Use and habit are far stronger powers than passion" sang the poet, and it required at first no effort for Hilda to do as she had done for weeks,

or all that was expected of her. She even sang with the others that night, for she had a good alto voice and they needed her, and the clergyman made singing an important part of the camp-fire. As the flames rose high and the wood crackled and snapped, making the moon pale and rivaling the voices in noise, she began to feel as if she must go away, off by herself, away from all these good people and think it out—as if she had been wounded and was trying to hide it. She felt as she did once when it had been necessary for her to have ether and, “coming out of it,” began to realize pain and suffering. But habit was strong and did its work. She sang on and even talked gayly.

“Miss Hilda,” said the clergyman, “when you get to your Southern home, will you remember us as Northern barbarians, and astonish and amuse your father with tales of our uncouthness?”

"Certainly. I fully expect to spend all the winter in that way. The only trouble will be that we are hardly far enough South and he is hardly ignorant enough of the North to make him credit half the truth as to your savageness and want of civilization. Wally," for the boys were hard to get to bed when there was a camp-fire, "find auntie's hat, won't you? and come, Muzzie says I may put you and Bobby to bed and I'll finish that story."

And so she went on with the childish story she was inventing for the children and which served to make them glad to do her bidding and happy with her, and not till the last eye was closed, and the little voices silent, did she go to her room, and throw herself on her bed, and exclaim half aloud: "I'm hurt, oh, I'm hurt!"

Hilda's emotional nature had had little to prove or try it. It was almost unknown to herself; but her friends knew that her

affection concentrated itself on a few and that she had no power or wish to add to the number. They thought that there were depths to her nature untried and unknown ; and those who had studied her the most, her old friend Mr. Shephard being one, believed that few could be as faithful, few would prove as true and unselfish when tried, as the girl not many knew,—who scarcely knew herself. But even they would have been surprised at her capacity for loving, at the way she, usually so self-contained, had shown her feelings, at her agony of suffering now, at her absolute inability to entertain for a moment the idea that the man she loved was still hers. She as completely gave him up, after reading his letter, even while reading it, as if it had announced his marriage.

Nor was she suffering all on her own account ; it seemed to her as if both of

them had a cross to bear, but, alas! not together. Nor was there any idea of blaming him; she understood too well, by her own feelings, and by what had passed between them, just how it had come about that there could be no concealment of the torrent of emotion that had taken such complete possession of them; and as the hours and days went by, she sometimes wondered she had not felt the truth, known it without the telling. She never wondered at his not having told her; it seemed as if he had done it and she even felt thankful it had not been more plainly told, thankful that she had been allowed to love and be loved. As she waited for his coming and grew pale and quiet even in the few days, she lived in prospect all the coming years of her life, alone, save care for her father and her work. Mary Bruce had been her school-friend, and a true one for many years, and even

to her not a word of the real cause of her trouble could be said.

“Muzzie,” she said,—using the old pet name of the children—“I think I’ll go back as soon as Mr. Bruce comes, for father has gone home, and it will be lonely for him, and I’m not quite myself. He comes next week, and you’ll not need me.”

Mary could scarcely forbear from asking what of Mr. Scanning. She knew Hilda expected him Thursday, but beyond that nothing; and when her friend spoke of her future, there was no allusion whatever to him. It all seemed very strange; she had rejoiced in the romance of it all, rejoiced at her friend’s happiness, noticed how she loved him, with what abandon she had shown it, and had enjoyed with all a woman’s delight in such things, seeing his absolute devotion; and now what was the cloud? Would it last? She felt her friend’s suffering. It seemed to cast

the blackest of shadows over her own life, and clouded her anticipations of her husband's coming, and yet she could do nothing. She knew it was best to not interfere yet; if ever it would do any good, she was ready in any way to help.

CHAPTER XI.

For love himself took part against himself
To warn us off, and Duty, lov'd of Love,
Oh this world's curse—beloved but hated—came
Like death between thy dear embrace and mine.

TENNYSON.

As Hilda sat on the rocks Thursday evening, she was glad it was cloudy. The full moonlight would have seemed too dazzling for her sadness. As it was, the fleecy clouds went sailing by and the moon only now and then showed her face perfectly, as if she scarcely knew whether to cry or laugh, to be sad or gay. The lake was rough, for there had been a high wind all day, and the water, splashing loudly at her feet, seemed a live thing to her, and sympathizing.

Mr. Scanning could not pull his boat up

where he had landed that first night, and had to row to the sand. He bounded up the steps, even the little delay having increased his impatience. At first neither could speak; he held her close and gently kissed her hair, her eyes, her fair neck and cheek and quivering mouth. Rocks are not the softest kind of seat: there is usually an unyielding unevenness about them that is hard to overcome, and there is a difficulty about finding a satisfactory back, but if they had been much more uncomfortable in every way, it would have been no more noticed than seats of the softest down, made luxurious by every device of the upholsterer's art.

"Isn't it joy to have each other again," he murmured. "Oh, my love, my love!"

The moon glanced at them and looked back again; the clouds were thick and heavy.

"Do you love me? Will you ever be

tired of telling me? Will you ever be tired of hearing the same story, when it is old and older yet? Will you ever be tired of me, sweetheart?"

"Oh, George, don't; I cannot bear it."

"Did you miss me, little one? Oh, what will we do the weeks I'll have to be away? Let me see, I have reckoned it all up,—a week going, a week home, and a week returning,—can you spare me a month, dearest? I believe, truly, you can get along better without me than I can without you; kiss me and contradict me too."

"George, don't hold me so close to you; take your face away; you must not. Oh, don't!" as he kissed her again and again. "Let me tell you—"

"Tell me anything, dear, but stay in my arms; there, I'll be good and only hold you this way. What is it, sweetheart?"

"George,—you cannot come back," and a sob choked her for a moment.

"Come back, where ! I am back, are you dreaming, dear ? Look at me," and the moon only held a filmy veil over her face, so that Hilda could see by her light.

"Not that, but I must look all I shall have a chance to now. You are not mine ; I have no right here. Oh, what shall we do ? How can we bear it ?"

"Hilda, I am yours. You cannot mean I am not to have you for my own," and his voice was tender as she alone had ever heard it. "Why the idea is preposterous ! Come, little one, don't talk nonsense. See, the moon is looking at us ; it will be a glorious night yet, and to-morrow,—what shall we do to-morrow ?" And with the fear of some unknown danger he talked rapidly and excitedly, but the quiet little figure reached up her hand and placed it over his mouth, with another :

"Don't, you are making it so hard ; help me ; don't you understand you cannot be

mine if you have already given yourself to another woman? That is all; you cannot come back; Christmas is so' near." Another little sob and yet she would not cry; she had thought it would make him miserable, and if she did he must not know it. He sat away from her now and there were anger and surprise in his voice; the tenderness had all left it.

"You cannot mean it! Is what I have done to be punished this way? You don't forgive me, then?"

"Oh, George, it isn't that; it isn't what you have done, you couldn't help it, only, —how can I say it again? Take me back," with a plaintive little cry.

Quick as lightning he drew her to him, and the moon looked on with open, laughing face.

"I knew you could not mean it; were you only trying me? Oh, dearest, don't do it again, you don't need to." After a

long pause, while back the moon went out of sight, her low voice said, against his breast: .

“Dear, I was not teasing; you know too, don’t you, that we can never be as we had planned? I am stealing you now; but I can’t help it for just this once. I have suffered so! When you go away you must try and forget, for you said she was good and deserves all your thoughts. I could not bear my life if I thought I had made a good woman,—your wife,—unhappy.”

“Hilda,” almost fiercely, “you are my wife; what would I do with another? Don’t you see how I love you? Oh, dearest, you cannot be in earnest! I cannot, I will not live without you.”

“But the other one, doesn’t she love you, George?”

“I don’t know; no, I don’t believe she does, and what is it to us? No one must

come between you and me. Why, she doesn't know how to love,—I never knew till now. Say it is all a fancy you are over already, dear."

"No; oh, don't you see there is nothing for us to do, nothing for us to decide. I cannot say it again; it was all a dream. In a little while it will all be over—it must be. Hold me a few minutes longer; I am always afraid I am heavy. But you wouldn't mind it this once, would you?" with that little sob again in the low voice, and the moon had now shaken herself free from the cloudy fetters and was making a long silver track over the water.

The strong man felt helpless and almost hopeless; he thought he would let her have her own way and try again to-morrow; it couldn't be possible he would have to give her up, live without her; such a frail little thing would have to see it as

he did, he would try once again. "Hilda, do you love me?"

"Yes," simply.

"Do you know I love you?"

"Yes," again.

"Don't you think it would be a monstrous wrong for me to marry any one else?"

"I don't know. It would be, if she had not believed you her's for years, did not trust you, love you,—for she must love you,—if you had not given yourself to her before you loved me! Oh, she must never know, now you are not mine. You have never been! There is nothing for you to do but to fulfill your promise to her and your uncle as if I had never been."

He heard the tears in her voice, but felt weak against her strength. What could he do but give it up and whisper only words of tender love? And the time

passed with flying feet, as only time does when every moment is precious, when two people find each other's presence the best that life can give, when it is enough to know each other near, whether silent or not ; and the moon rode on, it was over the point now, its track lost in the trees, the evening star blinking and following.

She went with him to the boat, and in the lingering good-night, there was only a note of sadness ; no other word was said of the subject that filled both their thoughts.

As she watched the boat cleave the shining waters, she wondered in a dull way why she had met him again, why she had loved him, and what regulated people's lives, and why Fate was so cruel to her. He, rowing slowly on, saw the slight figure for a long way, and tried to assure himself that it would all come

right, and, man-fashion, put all disagreeable fears as far away as possible, though the sad, determined face haunted him with the look of its steadfast eyes.

CHAPTER XII.

Enough, that we are parted—that there rolls
A flood of headlong fate between our souls,
Whose darkness severs me as wide from thee
As hell from heaven, to all eternity!

MOORE.

"You don't happen to want no corn, do you?" and Flanders stepped out of a rickety old boat with a fish basket on his arm full of the delicious cereal. Of course they wanted it, for they knew well that at their other home their friends had been enjoying it for weeks, while this was the first they had seen. But few tried to raise corn in the Adirondacks, the season is too short and cold.

"Apples, too, Muzzie; see, he has apples!" exclaimed the boys. Small and sour, they would not have tasted them

anywhere else, though here they gladly paid two cents apiece for them

Hilda stood looking on at the sale. She had on the offending blue waist, this morning, and had worn it often lately; it was very pretty, but her friend thought how pale she looked, and noticed that the color did not come as it had been wont to do when the group was added to by the tall man in flannels and fatigue dress, who looked rather solicitously at her as he greeted them all gayly.

"Halloo! Flanders, you must have known I was coming to dinner," glancing mischievously at Mrs. Bruce. "Here boys, I can beat Flanders any day," and he gave them each a box of candy from the White Mountain House and, going to Hilda, said: "Do you like this sort of thing?" showing her a wooden hat-pin, paddle and other ornaments made of the native woods and sold at that hotel.

"Can't you come for a row? I've something else to show you."

They went to the clearing, Hilda saying to herself it was for the last time, and as he showed her the ring he had sent for, it seemed to her as if it was the coffin for her own funeral. He placed it on her white hand and kissed her soft fingers—and what could she do?

They walked about, roaming here and there, picking berries, investigating the little cabin, talking as only lovers do. She said: "Let us build it up and stay here. I'll look after the sheep and you'll go off with your gun and bring back all we'll need. Just see how the place is shut in from the world; we can not even see the path." And he said: "Agreed; we'll begin at once to build it over," and all that was said of the coming parting, was when, as he left her, not till night however, she asked: "When are you

going?" and he answered: "I have sent to engage passage, but last night I determined not to go at all till you said I might come back; it's all right now, though, isn't it?" and she only smiled the wannest little smile and brushed her cheek against his sleeve.

The next day she told him he would cease to love her if she let him do such a dishonorable thing; that when the novelty of it all wore off, he would regret it, would feel as if she had been the cause of his being ungrateful and faithless, and would despise her when he regretted his perfidy. He declared she should not send him off, that he would stay till she thought as he did and gave up her idea of sacrificing them both. Then she answered sadly, as her head dropped and her eyes filled:

"Then I must not see you again; per-

haps these days are a mistake as well as a wrong."

"Oh, dearest, once again. Take me and keep me."

"I cannot," sobbing now. "You are not your own to offer. I cannot make you dishonorable; you would be no happier than I would be."

One night, after she had been more tender than usual, she kissed him at parting as she had not done before, and the next morning, when he rowed across, he was met by Mary Bruce only, who received him to say Hilda had gone off with the children, she could not say where, for she really did not know.

Scanning sat on the piazza and looked at her earnestly.

"And, Mr. Scanning," she added, "she gave me this for you," handing him the little box he had given her with the ring, only a few days before.

"Oh, Mrs. Bruce, is there no hope?" and he eagerly took her hand.

"I don't know. I would do anything for Hilda's happiness; she has told me very little, but seems so unhappy and yet so quiet. When she gave me this and told me to say good-bye to you, she looked so sad; and when I asked her if there was no hope, she said 'There is nothing to hope about.' I am very sorry—for both of you," as he dropped her hand and turned away. He took it again and said good-bye and, with the step of a man with no hope, left her.

An hour or two later she saw a boat shove off from the opposite shore, and taking her glass saw it contained Mr. Fish and his boarder. They rowed down the lake, as she thought, to meet the stage, for there was baggage in the boat.

All the next day Hilda went about her

usual occupations with a numbed feeling. She several times had the thought that she was in a dream and must try and waken ; she had suffered so much lately that her capacity for it seemed over for a time. The boys tried to rouse her to interest in their play, but with no success. Even the dog, Scamp, with his early efforts at barking, only called forth the wannest smile. While the family were sitting on the piazza in the evening, watching the boats on the lake, they saw one of them stop at the rocks, and a young girl handed Mrs. Bruce some mail. Hilda scarcely noticed her friend till she came up to her, and said :

“ Here is a letter for you, dear.”

She took it mechanically, started as she saw the handwriting, and with a murmured “ I’ll be back in a moment,” went up stairs. Sitting close to the window to catch the fading light, she read :

“Hilda, I appeal to you once more, and I shall wait here in Saratoga till I hear from you. Do not wreck both our lives. It is absurd to say I could ever despise you, impossible that I should ever have a regret if you are mine. Once again, I love you ; I cannot believe but that you return that love. Call me back. It shall be just as you say : I will never go to England, or will go and return to you. Think of all the years, perhaps, to come, and don't make them unhappy for us by separation. Make me yours in the world's eyes, as I am now by right of my love for you. Write only the word ‘Come,’ and it shall mean all good things.

“Forever your own,

“GEORGE SCANNING.

“Windsor Hotel, Saratoga.”

“ ‘ Windward,’

“ Aug. 28.

“ MY DEAR MR. SCANNING:

“ Hilda has asked me to write. She is not well ; but don't feel alarmed. I found her with your letter, and, poor child ! she accepted my offer of help. She told me she could not write and for me to tell you that you would remain in her memory with honor unsullied and as associated with the happiest part of her life, and— Good-bye.

“ I must add, on my own account, that I think there is no hope. Whatever there is is unsurmountable. I think some way you don't understand her pure, upright nature, and that for her to live or do a wrong would be a death to happiness. Try and think her decision, whatever the occasion of it, is best. I know this is cold comfort, but you have my heartfelt sympathy. Nothing is dearer to me than my

friend's happiness, and for you to give up
a useless effort will leave her a better
chance to become calm, if not content.

“ With my best wishes,

“ Most sincerely yours,

“ MARY BRUCE.”

CHAPTER XIII.

From pain

A keener bliss they borrow.

How natural is joy, my heart!

How easy after sorrow!

JEAN INGELow.

Late in November, Hilda Ward was walking back and forth in the glass corridor of the largest hotel in Lakewood. She had gone there several weeks before with her father, whose failing health was causing her to forget herself in solicitude for him. She would have preferred the quieter house close to the water, but what man, who can possibly do so, goes to any but the largest, most expensive and luxurious hotel? Here the gayety jarred on her. At first, to sit in the immense office or reception-room, with its beautiful fire-place and

pile of logs, and watch the other occupants of the rocking-chairs and the procession up and down the hall-way was amusing. To describe this to her father, in his rather downcast moods, and speculate as to the people and their relations to each other, made the whole scene endurable, if not actually enjoyable, but some people they knew had found them out. One of them had taken her father to drive this morning, and she knew she must make her escape before their return, or there would be conversation, joking and companionship, which she was in no mood for. She was becoming so tired of it all. The excitement occasioned by her father's illness and the journey here and the novelty was wearing off. She felt so weary, so tired of everything. Her friends said she was not looking well, and asked her why the mountains had not had their usual effect of bestowing added health and vigor. For

the first time, she had fainted while reading to her father one evening, and sometimes since, felt that weary sense of coming unconsciousness that often becomes well known. Nature was revenging herself for sleepless nights and the strain she was keeping on herself.

She would walk to the lake. There she would have no one but herself—though sometimes she dreaded herself most of all. “Absence treasures every look and deed,” and she must forget.

It was pleasant by the water; the walk was dry and smooth; the pine-trees, ever fragrant, were restful to the eye. She walked a long way, almost around the lake. There was a pretty little rustic bridge and there she stood, looking down at the water, and thought—when was she not thinking?—of her summer. The quiet water and mild air were little like the mountains, but she saw many a resem-

blance. "How can I bear my life?" she often asked herself. "Will the pain never cease?" She started to hear a voice at her side, say :

"Am I as altogether unwelcome, as unexpected?" She looked up to see her old friend, Lloyd Shephard. "Are you contemplating suicide, Miss Hilda? I hope not, for my sake—well, I won't annoy you with the old subject. How is your father? I could not find him at the hotel, nor you, and I just guessed you would be near the water,—with the aid, that is, of the clerk, who had seen you start in this direction."

"How do you happen to be here?" Hilda asked, rather listlessly; for after the first surprise all interest had died out of her face.

Mr. Shephard was a medium man, as to size, good looks, manners, mind, and perhaps morals and age, though the latter

was hard to judge of. He wore glasses, was very blind without them and had a nervous way of pressing them against his eyes when he was talking. He had always supposed that some day Hilda would be his wife and, as he had never seen her show any particular interest in any other man, thought his chance was good. His ability for loving was also of a medium quality, and such love as he was capable of bestowing he bestowed on her, and was justly proud of her talents.

"More effort required," Hilda thought, for it was harder to appear natural before people who knew her well, and Mr. Shephard had noticed her pale cheeks and sad ways, though her father's health, he thought, accounted for them.

At lunch, Mr. Shephard was busy with his appetite and conversation with Colonel Ward. He explained that business connected with his paper had brought him to

New York, and he had "run down here to see how they were situated."

"What was there to do? Why not take a drive this afternoon?" The waiter annoyed him—though Hilda felt as if the old Hilda that used to be would have been amused by him.

He was an old darkey, though evidently new to that place, a veritable Uncle Tom in appearance—one almost expected to see the cabin around the corner. Mr. Shephard was hungry, or for some other reason he wanted an elaborate lunch. Uncle Tom could only remember the orders by audibly repeating them over and over: "Lobster, lobster, turkey, one vanilla, one lemon," and so on as he walked around the table, and off to execute them as well as his memory would let him. He had a head the color of a stove pipe newly polished, Hilda thought, and wondered if it had ever had any length of

hair on it. He set a finger-bowl gravely down before her, and her alone, though she was the only one who had not taken fruit or dessert of any kind.

As they walked down the long dining-room, the people who had been accustomed to see her father and her alone remarked to each other that doubtless that was the man she was engaged to and commented on his appearance. The comments were rather favorable than otherwise, and the conclusion was, generally, that he was quite good enough for her.

They did drive, or Hilda and Mr. Shephard did. Colonel Ward did not feel able to, and said he would sit awhile in the reading-room and then lie down. Would Hilda be in by five o'clock as a man was coming to see them about the cottage they thought of renting? She had long been used to doing everything she could to relieve him. He said he did not feel

equal to meeting a stranger and talking business.

Their driver thought they would enjoy the drive to Point Pleasant, and it was nearly five o'clock when they reached the hotel on their return. There was the appearance of excitement about the entrance that denoted the expectation of the evening train. Hilda went at once to her room, weary with the drive and the effort to talk and not excite comment. Her room had a curtained alcove, and they used it a good deal as a sitting-room, to be more private than the hotel parlor would be.

She threw herself on the lounge and thought the effort to dress for dinner would be altogether too much. What did she care for dinner anyway, and all those tiresome people! She scarcely heeded a knock at her door and, when it was repeated, said a scarcely audible

"Come in." A waiter told her a gentleman wished to see her, and she told him to show him up; why should she go down, she could ask questions about the cottage as well here as elsewhere? Oh, how every step reminded her of the step she should never hear again and which had been so dear to her!

"Hilda, my love, my love!" and the voice she knew so well was in her ear, and the arms she had longed for were around her. But she had lost consciousness after the first recognition and, as she slowly opened her eyes to see George Scanning kneeling beside her, she murmured, "Again," and closed them, thinking it a dream being repeated.

"Again, and again, and always," he said. "Look at me, love; I am back for good, as the children say. Oh, you thought you would get rid of me, didn't you?" his voice ringing with joyfulness,

"but you couldn't; I hunted you up, and here I am." After a while, when Hilda had recovered and looked rosy and like a different girl beneath his caresses and because of her happiness, she remembered and plaintively said:

"Oh, George, have we to do it all over again,—the parting? And how did you get back? when did you sail, and why, oh, why did you come?"

"I didn't go. Don't you remember I told you I wouldn't while you were so obstinate? My darling, I won't tease you, but will tell you the whole story. I put off going to England till the last minute, after I left you, and had that cruel letter you had sent me. Don't contradict; it was cruel. I started for the West. I need not tell you of my travels, but they were everywhere that I hoped to find interest, but I never did. Last week I returned to New York, knowing I could delay the

evil day of sailing no longer, and I found this letter. I went to Mrs. Bruce and have now found you. Oh, Hilda, I am free only as bound to you; all other bonds have slipped away from me."

The letter Hilda read was this :

" Bricton Park,

" Exmouth, North Devon.

" MY DEAR COUSIN GEORGE :

' Don't you think that as long as you are so happy away from me, we would be running a great risk to agree to spend the rest of our lives together? Of course you are happy, for you are in no hurry to come back. This has all been made clear to me by the fact that I am happy without you.

" Seriously, my dear cousin, I have found out what love is; only you have not shown me; that was left for your friend to do. Arthur is dreadfully cut up as to

what you will say, but I have told him I know you have never really cared for me, in that way,—I mean as he does,—and that he needn't worry. Just send me a line to say it is all right, and if you care to come back by Christmas, there will be a wedding about that time that you may take more interest in than you did in your own.

“Your affectionate cousin,

“GERTRUDE PALMER.

“Father is quite reconciled, so that need not trouble you.

“G.”

That night, at dinner, as Hilda came in late, people changed their minds and said:

“Why, she is pretty, and that new man must be the right one after all. Just see how he looks at her and how her color comes and goes.”



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